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10 March 1975

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DCI BRIEFING FOR
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
10:30 A.M., 10 MARCH 1975
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THE SITUATION IN CAMBODIA

The Military Situation

- I. Mr. Chairman, the situation in Cambodia can be summed up in one sentence: Substantial odds favor a Communist take over in the near future.
 - A. Turning to the military situation first, this map and table show the areas controlled by the two sides, and the size of the opposing forces.
 1. The Communists now have about 25,000 combat troops in the Phnom Penh area, versus about 45,000 on the government's side.
 2. Along the Mekong between Phnom Penh and the South Vietnamese border, the Communists have about 10,000 troops, and the government only about 6,000.
 3. Countrywide, Communist forces total some 60,000 to 70,000 combat troops compared to about 110,000 for the government.

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- B. Military action remains focused on the Phnom Penh area, where the Khmer Communists have edged to within artillery range of Pochentong airport. Until last week, the airport had been the target only of relatively ineffective rocket attacks.
1. Sporadic artillery shellings began last Wednesday when a DC-8 cargo aircraft belonging to World Airways -- one of four US charter airlines participating in the airlift -- was slightly damaged and the airlift was briefly suspended.
 2. Intermittent artillery attacks have persisted, but so has the airlift.
 3. The shellings followed successful insurgent attacks on the town of Tuol Leap on February 28, which allowed the Communists to bring captured 105-mm. howitzers within seven miles of the airport.
 4. Cambodian Army armor and infantry units are making an all-out effort to push the Communist back from the capital's northwestern defenses, but are meeting stiff resistance.

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5. Unless this operation makes real progress soon, there is a strong possibility that the Communists will damage aircraft and facilities at the airport enough to make airlift operations difficult or impossible.

C. The military situation in other areas around the capital is not much better.

1. The Communists have been maintaining pressure north of the city since the beginning of the year, and have chewed up a succession of government units on this front.
 - a. The army's 7th Division, for example, started the dry season with about 3,000 troops. It now has an effective strength of about 1,000.
 - b. Other units north of the capital have taken similar losses.
2. Following a brief lull, the Communists are now again attacking along the Mekong River northeast of the capital, where their momentum has carried them within mortar range of the main navy headquarters.
3. There have been daily rocket attacks against

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downtown Phnom Penh and key outlying facilities from this area since the beginning of the year.

- a. The insurgents' Chinese-manufactured 107-mm. rockets are inaccurate and relatively ineffective against installations, but almost every day they kill a number of civilians in the capital, which is packed with refugees.
4. There have not yet been any major ground attacks on Phnom Penh's southern defenses. The Communists, however, are keeping enough pressure on this front to prevent the army command from withdrawing units to reinforce more active sectors.
- D. The steady decline of government military fortunes in the Phnom Penh area has already led to the evacuation of personnel from some embassies. These include those of South Vietnam and South Korea, and some dependents from the British and Commonwealth embassies will leave tomorrow.
- E. Outside of the immediate Phnom Penh area, the crucial spot is the Mekong River -- formerly the main government supply line. The insurgents

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have succeeded in keeping this route closed since early February. There is now little prospect that it can be reopened to shipping in the next few months.

1. The Communists have made substantial ground gains along the river, and now control all key terrain -- including two vital river narrows -- from a point 15 miles southeast of Phnom Penh to the South Vietnamese border.
2. A 1,000 man government force abandoned the last remaining beachhead on the lower reaches of the river late last week. Since then, government holdings in the Mekong corridor have been reduced to the 6,000-man enclave around the navy base at Neak Luong.
3. The government has been forced to commit all available ground units to the defense of Phnom Penh, foreclosing at least temporarily further major efforts to push the insurgents back from the riverbanks. Consequently, the combined threat of intense shore fire and the mines the Communists have sown in the shipping channel is too great to risk sending a supply

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convoy upriver. (The insurgents apparently obtained the mines from China.)

F. In the countryside, the Communists are attacking a number of widely separated government-held provincial centers.

1. These include the towns of Takeo and Kampot in the southwest, Svay Rieng in the far southeast, Kompong Cham and Kompong Thom in the north, and Kompong Chnnang and Siem Reap in the northwest.
2. At the beginning of the dry season, the government had about 60,000 troops stationed in the provinces. Most were assigned to static territorial defense units. On the few occasions when these units have fought outside their home territory, they have not performed well.
3. The government, nonetheless, has taken the best of the provincial units to help in the defense of Phnom Penh.
4. So far the only serious government losses in the countryside have been the towns of Oudong -- a psychologically import former

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royal capital north of Phnom Penh -- and Muong Russei in the northwest -- a key agricultural center.

- G. We see no indication that Communist military pressure will significantly lessen in the near future.
1. As in past years, heavy casualties have forced the Communists to send relatively young and poorly trained units into battle. Insurgent commanders, however, use draconian methods to keep their troops on the line, and so far there is no sign of any overall weakening of Communist resolve and determination.
 2. As for their supply situation, the insurgents appear to have had significantly more materiel at the beginning of this year than in previous years.
 - a. During last year's dry season fighting, we had considerable hard evidence of severe ammunition and supply shortages among many Communist units. This year we have very little such evidence.

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- b. Our information is not good enough to estimate precisely how much aid -- either in quantity or dollar terms -- the Khmer Communists have been receiving from China and North Vietnam, but we do know that the USSR provides very little.
 - c. The Soviets are in somewhat of an embarrassing situation in Cambodia. It has never broken diplomatic relations with Phnom Penh, and has never had close contacts with the Khmer Communists.
3. We have received new information in the past week or so of renewed munitions deliveries to the Cambodian northeast from China and North Vietnam.
- a. These are probably the arms that Prince Sihanouk had in mind when he recently stated that North Vietnamese Premier Pham Vang Dong and Defense Minister Giap had agreed to speed up the transshipment of Chinese materiel to Cambodia.
 - b. Sihanouk has often claimed -- and our evidence supports him -- that Peking provides the insurgents most of their arms, and that Hanoi merely transports them south.
- H. The government's supply situation, on the other hand, is critical.

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1. The ongoing airlift is meeting current ammunition requirements, and most of Phnom Penh's minimum daily rice and POL requirements.
2. With the closure of the Mekong, deliveries by river have stopped, and stocks are at low levels as shown in this chart.
3. Should the airlift continue uninterrupted, allowing delivery of all supplies obligated to Cambodia under present funding, ammunition could last until late April at present consumption rates. Should consumption increase to the higher levels of this past January, the stocks would be exhausted by early April. Rice and POL, however, should last some time longer.

The Political Situation

- II. The military deterioration and the tightened supply situation have had considerable effect on the domestic political front.
 - A. In the past two weeks, there have been minor student demonstrations in Phnom Penh and a number of provincial centers.

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1. The protests have been aimed at the Chinese communities for their control of commerce and privileged position, but are rooted in the inability of most of the population to obtain basic goods at prices they can pay.
 2. Rice stocks in Phnom Penh, for example, have been hovering near the levels which precipitated fairly widespread rioting and looting in 1972.
 3. To date, government authorities have been able to contain the demonstrations, but the combination of racial tensions and supply shortages is a volatile one and widespread disorders could erupt at any time.
 4. Given the facts that most security forces are on the fighting front, and that those who are left have low morale and poor discipline, the government might not be able to cope with such a situation.
- B. In addition, pessimism and recrimination is on the rise among senior government officials.
1. Many civilian leaders, for example, are

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blaming the army commander in chief, General Fernandez, for the deteriorating military situation and want him replaced.

- a. Prime Minister Long Boret wants to reshuffle his cabinet to ease out Fernandez and increase civilian control over the military. Yesterday President Lon Nol indicated that he would demote Fernandez within the next few days.
 - b. In the present unstable situation, however, even minor leadership changes might lead to a general unraveling of political cohesion in Phnom Penh.
2. Criticism of President Lon Nol for his alleged inflexibility toward negotiations and his weaknesses as a ruler is also becoming more open.
- a. Much of this is simply the result of frustrations over the inability of any party to find a feasible route leading to negotiations and a compromise settlement.
 - b. Lon Nol has made it clear that he would be willing to step down if he were an obstacle to peace, but he does not believe that at this point his resignation would lead to negotiations.
- C. There are, in fact, no signs that the Communists are prepared to back away from their hard line

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on a settlement, or that the departure of Lon Nol would open the way to a compromise settlement.

1. At this point, the Communists are confident that time is on their side and appear to be banking on either total military victory or a government surrender in the guise of a negotiated settlement.
2. In the face of this intractable Communist position, there nonetheless appears to be a growing belief that the present leadership can neither survive nor negotiate.
3. In the present critical military situation, there will probably be an intensification of political maneuvering in Phnom Penh in the next few weeks.

III. On the Communist side, there are also a number of political complexities. These complexities involve the in-country Khmer Communists' relations with Prince Sihanouk, the North Vietnamese, and the Chinese.

A. Sihanouk's Role: Prince Sihanouk and his national-

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istic, non-Communist supporters can be disposed of fairly easily. Sihanouk may play a vocal role in coming weeks, but his real influence will be minimal.

1. In the early years of the conflict, Sihanouk had a wide following within the insurgency, and the Communists played up his role. They recognized that the prince gave their movement a legitimacy, both within and outside Cambodia.
2. Sihanouk's one -- and only -- visit to the Communist zone in March 1973 was clearly a propaganda effort.
3. In recent years, however, Sihanouk's position has so eroded that his real authority has evaporated almost completely. This was the deliberate work of the Communists, who came to regard him as a potential political challenge in a post-hostilities Cambodia.
4. The Communists have weeded out or assimilated Sihanouk's in-country followers to the point that the once clear-cut faction that supported his return is no longer distinguishable.
5. Sihanouk's loss of authority was dramatized early this year when it was formally announced that most portfolios in his exile "government" had been transferred to in-country Khmer Com-

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munists. Originally a minority in Sihanouk's cabinet, they now control 14 of the 17 portfolios.

5. Sihanouk himself has often said that he would play no significant leadership rôle in a post-war, Communist-controlled Cambodia.

a. We agree with that assessment, though we believe that he might remain a figurehead leader of the insurgents for some time.

B. North Vietnam and China: Both North Vietnam and China will exert significant influence on future Cambodian developments.

1. Hanoi has ties with the Cambodian Communists that go back more than two decades.

a. Early Cambodian Communist leaders in fact were almost all former members of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party -- the precursor to the North Vietnamese Lao Dong Party -- which Ho Chi Minh dissolved in 1951.

b. Hanoi nurtured the Cambodian Communist Party during Cambodia's struggle for independence from France.

c. Nearly 6,000 Cambodians accompanied Viet Minh forces when they were repatriated to

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North Vietnam following 1954 Indo-China settlement. These cadre were trained and returned to Cambodia over the course of the next decade. They form the core of the insurgent military arm.

d. Following Sihanouk's ouster in 1970, North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong units participated in the crash effort to recruit and train Cambodian insurgent units. While the insurgent military arm was being built up -- during the first two years of the conflict -- Vietnamese Communist forces fought most of the battles against the Cambodian army.

e. At the same time, Vietnamese political cadre helped expand and strengthen the Communist political infrastructure in Cambodia.

2. Following their initial dependence on the North Vietnamese, the Khmer Communist leadership has displayed an increasingly nationalistic and independent attitude in recent years. Racial animosities between Cambodians and Vietnamese are traditionally strong, and have at times adversely affected relations between the two parties. These frictions should not be exaggerated, however, since strong residual ties remain.

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- a. Khmer Communist strongman Ieng Sary, for example, is one of several top insurgent leaders who is believed to have spent some time in North Vietnam, and is said to be strongly influenced by Hanoi.
 - b. A high-ranking Viet Cong delegation paid a visit to the Communist zone early this year -- the first by a foreign delegation. This produced a "Cambodian-Vietnamese friendship society" headed by the top insurgent leader, Khieu Samphan.
 - c. In addition to its military assistance, Hanoi last fall apparently reached some economic aid agreement with the insurgents, although no specifics are known.
3. China's involvement with the insurgency is relatively new, but Peking's equities in Cambodia's future appear well protected.
- a. China really became involved only after Sihanouk's ouster in 1970, when Chinese leaders allowed him to establish his government in exile in Peking and have bankrolled this operation ever since.

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- b. We have not been able to determine exactly when the Chinese began supplying arms to the insurgents, but there was probably a substantial aid program well before the public acknowledgement of a military assistance pact ~~was published in the press~~ last spring.
 - c. This agreement stemmed from a widely publicized visit to Peking by Khmer Communist "Defense Minister and Deputy Premier" Khieu Samphan. This visit was apparently the beginning of a mutual effort to improve ties.
 - d. Despite Peking's continued relations with Sihanouk, China appears intent on increasing its stock with the in-country insurgents to a level that would rival that of Hanoi.
 - e. China would probably offer liberal assistance to a post-war Khmer Communist reconstruction effort in order to maximize its influence in the region.
4. The USSR has so far not had much of a role in Cambodia. It would try through diplomatic means

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The Future

IV. The next few weeks will be critical. As I stated earlier, the odds are substantial that the Communists will take over in Cambodia in the near future. Nevertheless, there is still a chance, however, that Phnom Penh itself can survive; supported by the airlift. If it does survive until July or August, the flood waters on the Mekong might make it easier to reopen the river. There is no real prospect, however, that the government could regain the overall military initiative at that time.

A. Having said that, I now want to discuss the situation that would arise if the government's military position continues to deteriorate. There are several ways in which the insurgents could take over Phnom Penh.

1. Individual groups -- including government military units -- could try to make their separate peace with the Communists.
2. Another possibility is that a caretaker government might take over -- either by force or by mutual agreement -- from the current leadership, and then accept settlement on Communist terms.

B. What Would the Communists Do Once in Power? The Communists could be expected to move quickly to

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consolidate power, whether they won by an outright military victory or by default following a general disintegration of the government's side.

1. Their immediate objective would be to occupy urban centers, in order to disarm the Cambodian armed forces while assuming control of the machinery of state.
2. Bloodletting would be inevitable. As Communist units mopped up pockets of resistance, discipline probably would break down and wanton killing would result. In addition, Communist leaders would settle old scores with any leading national and provincial level officials unable to flee the country.
 - a. Bureaucrats, intelligentsia, and former government military officers would no doubt be subjected to incarceration, coercion, and some exemplary executions -- probably limited to people with a substantial connection to the present regime.
 - b. The lower strata of society in the government zone would probably undergo a less formal but still traumatic process.
3. Most population centers now under government control contain large numbers of refugees and stocks

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of basic commodities would be extremely tight following a Communist take-over.

- a. To ease the situation, the Communists would forcefully resettle many refugees, and would probably evacuate large numbers of city dwellers into the countryside -- where conditions would not be much better.
 - b. Supply shortages would cause the Communists major problems for some months. There would be real hardship unless they received substantial and rapid external assistance.
4. Once they solved immediate problems, the Communists would begin pursuing their long term objective: the imposition of their brand of Marxist-Leninism on Cambodian society. Essentially this would mean the implementation throughout the country of programs long underway in the Communist controlled zone. These include:
- An intensive indoctrination program for all individuals associated with the former regime;
 - Destruction of the traditional administrative system and its replacement by a centralized government under the leadership of the Khmer Communist Party;

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- Confiscation of privately owned land and the tools of agriculture;
 - Establishment of government controlled communes;
 - Nationalization of all light industry and means of commerce; and
 - Gradual replacement of Buddhism by Communist-controlled mass front organizations.
5. Such measures have not gone down well with the land-proud, religious, and independent-minded Cambodian peasantry. Over the years, significant numbers of peasants have abandoned their farms and fled from Communist controlled territory.
- a. Smoldering resentment among those that have remained behind has occasionally caused small-scale uprisings, which the Communists have put down ruthlessly.
 - b. Even if they won full control of the country, the Communists would continue to meet similar resistance to their programs. Once the Communists were to take over few people would have any chance of fleeing the country.
 - c. The Cambodian Communists do not have the pool of well-trained cadres the Vietnamese

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Communists rely on, but they would push their efforts to regiment and collectivize ~~R~~mer society relentlessly, using force where necessary.

- V. Effects on South Vietnam. In and of itself, a Communist take-over in Cambodia would have only a minimal effect on the military situation in South Vietnam.
- A. The North Vietnamese already have everything they need in Cambodia to prosecute the war in South Vietnam.
- B. South Vietnamese leaders, for their part, would not regard the loss of Cambodia by itself as critical to their own cause.

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